

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION AT
ST KATHERINE'S PRECINCT,
LEDBURY, HEREFORDSHIRE

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With a contribution by Angus Crawford

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Archaeological evaluation at St Katherine's precinct, Ledbury, Herefordshire

Darren Miller and Stephen Potten

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Part 1: Summary

The land and buildings of St Katherine's precinct (NGR 371051 237692) occupy the site of the medieval hospital of St Katherine. This report addresses the archaeological implications of a proposed development near two surviving medieval buildings. It is based on the excavation of a 12m-long trench, and on documentary research.

The trench exposed significant remains of medieval date. The most significant discovery was a wall made of local stone rubble faced with lias. The wall suggests a substantial stone building on the same axis and scale as a 13th/14th century hall and chapel to the east. A few sherds of pottery were found in earlier and later contexts. These suggest that the building was built in the 13th century and demolished in the late 16th or 17th century. It certainly formed part of the medieval hospital of St Katherine, and may have been another hall or a range of chambers. Other remains included a line of postholes that seem to indicate a timber scaffold. The medieval remains were buried beneath post-medieval and modern made ground.

On the basis of the evidence summarised above, the proposed development is likely to impact on important archaeological deposits. Remains similar to those in the trench can be expected across the area where construction is proposed. It is also likely that floors and other features of the stone building survive *in situ*. Any programme of work will be decided by the local authority, but the Service draws attention to the relatively small sample obtained by the single trench and recommends further evaluation to establish the extent of the stone building and its relationship to the proposed development. The Service also suggests that any further mitigation might include a community archaeology project, as the nature of the archaeological deposits and the site's location in the modern town, provide an ideal opportunity for such a project.

Part 2: Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

The project was commissioned by Herefordshire County Council, who intend to build a library to the south of the Master's House in St Katherine's precinct, off Ledbury High Street (NGR 371051 237692; Fig 1). Hereford Archaeology (the Council's archaeological service) considered that significant remains might be affected by the proposed development and required an evaluation to address this issue and inform the forthcoming planning application. This requirement followed planning authority policies on archaeology and development.

1.2 Specifications

The project conforms to a brief prepared by Herefordshire Archaeology (Herefordshire Archaeology 2008) and to a proposal prepared by the Service (HEAS 2008). It also conforms to the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 2001).

1.3 Aims

The aims of the project were to define the character and extent of any archaeological remains in the area of the proposed development, to establish their significance, and to assess their vulnerability to disturbance. The project also aimed to produce a satisfactory report and archive.

1.4 Methods

1.4.1 Documentary research

Before the fieldwork began, information on the site was obtained from Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record. This included records of all archaeological monuments and events within a 100m radius of the proposed development. Other sources held by the Service were also consulted. Some of these are referred to below, and a full list is given in the bibliography. The same sources were also re-assessed after the fieldwork, in the light of the results.

1.4.2 Fieldwork

Following consultations between the client and curator, it was decided to excavate a single trench in a shrubbery on the south side of the Master's House (Fig. 2; Plate 1). The shrubbery lay in the approximate location of the proposed library, and excavation there avoided encroaching on a busy car park further to the south.

Fieldwork was undertaken between the 9th and 11th of June 2008. Modern topsoil and made ground were removed by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision. Further cleaning and excavation was then undertaken by hand. Drawn, written, and photographic records were compiled according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). After recording, the trench was backfilled with the excavated spoil.

1.4.3 **Post-fieldwork analysis**

Stratigraphy

All stratigraphic relationships identified in the field were checked and a Harris matrix was produced (Appendix 2). This analysis provided the basis for the narrative in Section 2.1.

Artefacts

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995), although only selected artefacts were recovered from machine-excavated deposits, and from deposits with common brick/tile fragments. All artefacts were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date produced for each stratified context (see Table 3). The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992; Hurst 1994).

1.5 **Historical and archaeological background**

The land and buildings of St Katherine's precinct occupy the site of the medieval hospital of St Katherine. An excellent history of the hospital has been written, based on surviving medieval archives and buildings (Hillaby 2003). The following summary is based largely on this book and an earlier archaeological assessment of Ledbury (Bryant 1996). It also refers to Sites and Monuments Records, further details of which are available online at www.smr.herefordshire.gov.uk.

The hospital (SMR 11322) was founded by Bishop Foliot of Hereford around 1230, probably on the site of an episcopal residence. Like most medieval hospitals, it was a charitable and religious institution endowed with a modest estate. On this basis, a small staff of chaplains and servants were employed to care for thirteen poor and needy residents. The whole community followed a religious rule that involved prayers for the hospital's founder and benefactors, although by the late 14th century, most intercession was performed by the chaplains, as a college of priests.

Little is known about the plan of the medieval hospital, although the square precinct visible on 19th century maps was probably laid out at the foundation, while the surviving 14th century hall and chapel (SMR 151869) probably replaced an earlier building of the same type. A number of buildings are mentioned in medieval archives, eg an inventory of 1316 which mentions a kitchen, pantry, larder, and brewhouse, and other agricultural buildings. Other buildings will also have accommodated documented chaplains, sisters, and servants. Most of the Master's House (SMR 151872) was built in the late 15th century, although the original open hall with service and solar wings has been considerably modified and encased in brick. The buildings along the frontages of High Street and Bye Street were probably shops and houses leased by the hospital to various tenants (SMR 12228, 19896 and 19897). Something of the character of occupation on Bye Street has been established by previous small-scale fieldwork (SMR 35367 and 45159; Nash, Wainwright, and Appleton-Fox 2002).

Unlike other hospitals, St Katherine's retained some of its functions after the Dissolution, becoming an almshouse for the deserving poor (SMR 19891). New buildings were added and some of the older buildings were restored. The detached kitchen on the north side of the Master's House may date from this period. A new barn was built on the opposite side of the precinct in the 17th or early 18th century (SMR 151870). These buildings survive, but others were demolished by the early 19th century. Most of the precinct has remained undeveloped since then, apart from being surfaced as a car park.

2. Results

2.1 Stratigraphy

The deposits and features described below are illustrated on Figure 3. Full details are contained in the appendices.

2.1.1 Medieval deposits and features

Raglan Mudstone of the Lower Old Red Sandstone, British Geological Survey, 1988, 1:50000, sheet 216) was exposed in a sondage at the east end of the trench (Fig 3, context 130; Plate 6). It was sealed by a layer of redeposited marl mixed with silty sand, and fragments of charcoal and bone (Fig 3, context 120; Plate 6). This sequence suggests an episode of landscaping, involving both truncation and deposition. A single sherd of medieval pottery was found in the layer above the marl.

The redeposited marl was cut by three postholes (Fig 3, contexts 123, 125, and 127), and a possible post-pit (Fig 3, context 129). The postholes formed a line on an east to west axis, and were evenly spaced at *c*2.75m (9 feet) intervals. Only one of the post-holes could be sampled in the time available (Fig 3, context 125). The fill (Fig 3, context 124) produced a single sherd of Malvernian cooking pot, probably manufactured in the 13th century.

Just south of the postholes were the remains of a stone wall on the same east to west alignment (Fig 3, contexts 118, 119, and 121; Plates 2-5). The remains were very truncated, but enough survived to indicate the character and scale of the wall. Three elements were visible at the west end of the trench: a rubble base (Fig 3, contexts 117=118), a fragmentary course of flat stones representing the foundation for an outer face (Fig 3, contexts 119), and a rubble core (Fig 3, context 121). Assuming these identifications are correct, the remains of an inner face should survive just beyond the south edge of the trench. With regard to its dimensions, the wall was at least 7m long and around 1.25m (4 feet) wide. On this evidence, it is reasonable to infer that the wall belonged to a large stone building, quite possibly of two storeys. At all events, free-standing walls of this kind are not common in medieval contexts, while similar walls are found in countless medieval churches and other stone buildings. Moreover, no timber-framed building known to the Service has or had such substantial foundations.

There was no clear evidence of an entrance or return that might indicate the plan or function of the building. Some stones near the centre of the trench were slightly offset from the line of stones established to the west (Fig 3, context 113), and were originally thought to represent a threshold or porch. However, on reflection, the difference is too slight to support this interpretation. Most probably, the stones simply formed part of the outer face of the wall. Similarly, although there were two courses of stones and a spread of mortar at the far west end of the trench, this need not indicate anything more than additional levelling and a minor spillage.

The latest deposit of medieval date was a layer of greenish-brown sand with common small gravels (context 109). This layer was probably a surface abutting the outer face of the upstanding wall.

2.1.2 Post-medieval deposits and features

The stone wall was evidently demolished and comprehensively robbed. The date of demolition and robbing is uncertain, but may be indicated by four sherds of late 16th/17th century pottery that were found directly on top of between the rubble core and base (context 102). The remains were then partly obscured by made ground (contexts 103, 110, and 116), and truncated in two places by pits (Fig 3, contexts 112 and 115). The fill of the larger pit

(Fig 3, context 111), contained several fragments of 17th/18th century brick. Thereafter, a larger area was made up with redeposited topsoil (context 108).

2.1.3 Modern deposits and features

The redeposited topsoil was cut by a ceramic drain of late 19th/early 20th century type (Fig 3, context 106/107). The drain followed the same alignment as the demolished medieval wall. At a later date, both features were cut by another drain on a different alignment (Fig 3, context 104/5). Finally, around 0.75m of topsoil was deposited across the area (contexts 100 and 101).

2.2 Artefacts, by Angus Crawford

The assemblage is summarised below (Table 1)

Context	Material	Type	Total	Weight (g)
100	Brick	Post-medieval	1	281
100	Clay tobacco pipe	Stem	1	1
100	Pot	Late post-medieval to modern	1	27
100	Tile	Roof	3	500
101	Bone	Animal	1	22
101	Drain	Field	1	613
101	Glass	Bottle	1	23
101	Tile	Roof	5	1542
102	Pottery	Medieval	1	2
102	Pottery	Post-medieval	4	106
103	Ceramic building material	Various	4	42
103	Iron	Nails	2	11
103	Pottery	Post-medieval	1	3
103	Tile	Roof	1	76
111	Brick	Post-medieval	5	629
111	Tile	Roof	1	89
120	Bone	Animal	2	4
120	Pottery	Medieval	1	2
124	Coal		1	13
124	Pottery	Medieval	1	18

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

2.2.1 Pottery

The pottery assemblage consisted of nine sherds of pottery weighing 158g. In addition fragments of tile, brick, clay tobacco pipe, bottle glass, field drain, iron nails and animal bone were recovered. The group came from seven stratified contexts and could be dated from the medieval period onwards (see Table 1). Level of preservation was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying low levels of abrasion.

Context	Fabric	Fabric common name	Total	Weight (g)
100	85	Modern stone china	1	27
102	150	Deerfold/Lingen ware	4	106
102	64.1	Worcester-type sandy glazed ware	1	2
103	91	Post-medieval buff wares	1	3

120	99	Miscellaneous medieval wares	1	2
124	56	Malvernian unglazed ware	1	18

Table 2: *Quantification of the pottery by fabric*

Medieval

Only three sherds of pottery were identified as dating to the medieval period. These consisted of a distinctive body sherd of Worcester-type sandy glazed ware (fabric 64.1, context 102) dating from the late 11th to 14th century and a single sherd of Malvernian unglazed ware (fabric 56, context 124) dating from the late 12th-14th century. While both fabric types are broadly produced during the medieval period the main *floruit* of the Worcester sandy glazed ware is during the 13th to 14th century, while that of the Malvernian unglazed ware is during the 13th century.

The remaining medieval sherd was small and abraded and could only be generally classified under miscellaneous medieval wares (fabric 99, context 120) and therefore, only broadly dated to the period. However, it is worth noting that the sherd is of oxidised fabric with a micaceous gritty fabric with reddish brown sandstone inclusions typical of Hereford produced wares.

Post-medieval

Five sherds of pottery were identified as post-medieval within the assemblage. However, four were of Deerfold/ Lingen ware (fabric 150, context 102) and, as from a single context, may be indicative of sherds from a single vessel. Deerfold/Lingen ware was produced in Hereford during the late 16th to 17th century.

The remaining sherd was of post-medieval buff ware (fabric 91, context 103) with a typical black glaze over an iron rich red slip and dateable to the 18th century.

Modern

A single sherd of modern stone china (fabric 85, context 100) was present within the assemblage. The body was decorated with transfer applied blue and white decoration of 'oriental style' of a type commonly produced during the 19th and 20th century.

2.2.2 **Other finds**

The remaining artefacts consisted of types commonly encountered within late post-medieval and modern urban assemblages, including bottle glass, animal bone and fragments of ceramic building material.

3. **Synthesis**

3.1 **Medieval**

The earliest evidence of activity relates to the construction of a large stone building. This involved the creation of a substrate by a combination of stripping and deposition. The stone walls were then built off this substrate, and it is likely that the parallel and contemporary postholes represent a length of timber scaffolding. Similar substrates have been identified on other medieval sites e.g. at the Commandery in Worcester (another medieval hospital), where large stone buildings were raised on compacted marl and crushed sandstone substrates

(Miller Crawford and Dalwood 2007). Postholes for scaffolding have also been identified around medieval churches, castles, and manor houses (Rodwell 2005, 149-151). The extent of the building is uncertain, but it was probably larger than the Master's House to the north, and could have been as large as the combined hall and chapel to the east (Fig 4). If so, it was probably another hall, or a range of private chambers. With regard to its date, the sherds from the substrate and from one of the postholes suggest a date of construction in the 13th century. It is impossible to be more precise, but given the scale of the building and its central location within the precinct, it was probably built in the original phase of construction around 1240. On present evidence, it seems to have stood until the late 16th or 17th century, although further work would be necessary to confirm this dating.

Medieval deposits exist at a depth of between *c* 700-900mm from the present carpark surface.

3.2 **Post-medieval**

The post-medieval period saw the demolition and robbing of the stone building, but little other activity of note. The area was covered with topsoil, and this may indicate the creation of a garden. This is likely enough, given the continued occupation and refurbishment of the Master's House to the north, and the depiction of gardens on the earliest historic maps.

3.3 **Modern**

At some point in the last half-century, the gardens of the precinct were landscaped and re-surfaced as a car park. The landscaping may have removed some medieval and post-medieval remains, but clearly did not involve the truncation that often accompanied this change of use. Rather, it seems that a large area was made up with topsoil, leaving most earlier deposits intact.

4. **Significance**

The remains of the stone building are clearly significant. In the first place, they have the potential to provide important new information on the medieval hospital of St Katherine. As discussed above, the building was clearly large and important, and it seems to have stood from the foundation of the hospital right up to the Reformation and beyond. An understanding of this building would therefore add greatly to existing knowledge. Secondly, this information would be the first of its kind from any medieval hospital in Herefordshire, and a welcome addition to the small amount of evidence from other medieval hospitals in the West Midlands.

The later remains identified in the evaluation are not significant, or at least have little potential to provide important information. It is possible, however, that significant remains survive in the surrounding area eg garden features or made ground containing large amounts of medieval building materials.

5. **Potential impacts**

At present, the proposed development involves the construction of a new library in the area south of the Master's House and west of the hall and chapel. As shown on Figure 4, this area includes the suggested footprint of the medieval stone building. Any development in this area would therefore have major archaeological implications. Without mitigation, it is likely that significant remains, which exist at a depth of *c* 700mm below the present car park surface, will be truncated or removed. The severity of truncation would depend on the foundation design, which has yet to be decided, but almost any design would have a significant impact on the walls, floors, and other features that are likely to survive. Drainage works associated with construction would have an additional impact, as shown by the concrete-covered drain found at the west end of the trench. Finally, the proposed development might require a

considerable amount of ground reduction. This would certainly be necessary if the floor level was to correspond with that of the Master's House. Landscaping on this scale would probably result in severe truncation or removal of remains.

6. Recommendations

Some form of archaeological mitigation will certainly be required, if the proposed development is to take place. The scope of any mitigation will be decided by the planning authority, but two courses of action seem to be worthy of consideration. One is to recognise that the single trench represents the limited sample and that further evaluation would provide more information on the extent and degree of preservation of deposits. The other is to consider the possibility of running a community excavation as part of any future mitigation. Herefordshire Archaeology has considerable experience in organising such projects (see Historic Herefordshire Online), and there are already several local groups with closely related interests (eg The Friends of the Master's House, and the Ledbury and District Society). The site is also located in a busy town, so that recruiting a volunteer team and generating much public interest should be very successful. A project of this kind would have considerable social and educational benefits, and would create a short-term tourist attraction. It would also raise the profile of the development, and give greater community ownership.

7. Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, and unless directed otherwise, the Service intends to publish the following summary as the basis in appropriate local or regional journals.

In June 2008, the Worcestershire Historic Environment Service undertook a field evaluation in St Katherine's precinct in Ledbury (NGR SO 71045 37629), the site of a medieval hospital, and the proposed site of a new library. The fieldwork involved the excavation of a trench in the area of the proposed development. This was followed by analysis of the archive, and a limited amount of documentary research.

The trench exposed significant remains of medieval date. The most significant discovery was a wall made of local stone rubble faced with lias. The wall suggests a substantial stone building on the same axis and scale as a 13th/14th century hall and chapel to the east. A few sherds of pottery were found in earlier and later contexts. These suggest that the building was built in the 13th century and demolished in the late 16th or 17th century. It certainly formed part of the medieval hospital of St Katherine, and may have been another hall or a range of private chambers. Other remains included a line of postholes that seem to indicate a timber scaffold. The medieval remains were buried beneath post-medieval and modern made ground.

8. Acknowledgements

Mick Ligema (Assistant Manager, Cultural Services), commissioned the project, provided essential information, and helped to organise the fieldwork. Further information was provided by Lucy Dingwall (SMR Officer, Herefordshire Archaeology), Ian Robertson (Conservation Officer, Planning Services), and Joe Hillaby.

9. Personnel

The project was led by Darren Miller. Fieldwork was undertaken by Darren Miller and Stephen Potten, finds analysis by Angus Crawford, and illustration by Carolyn Hunt. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers.

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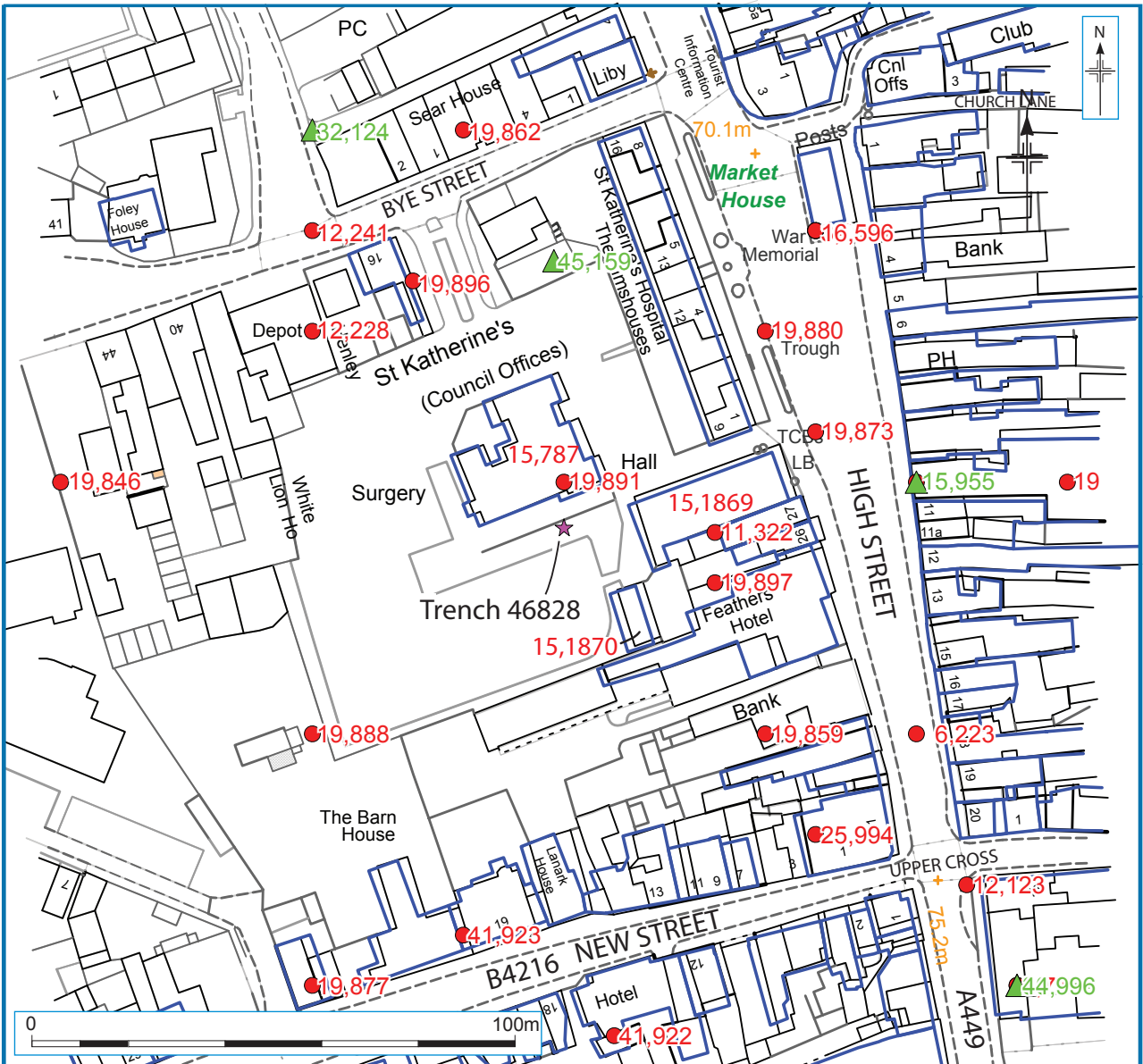
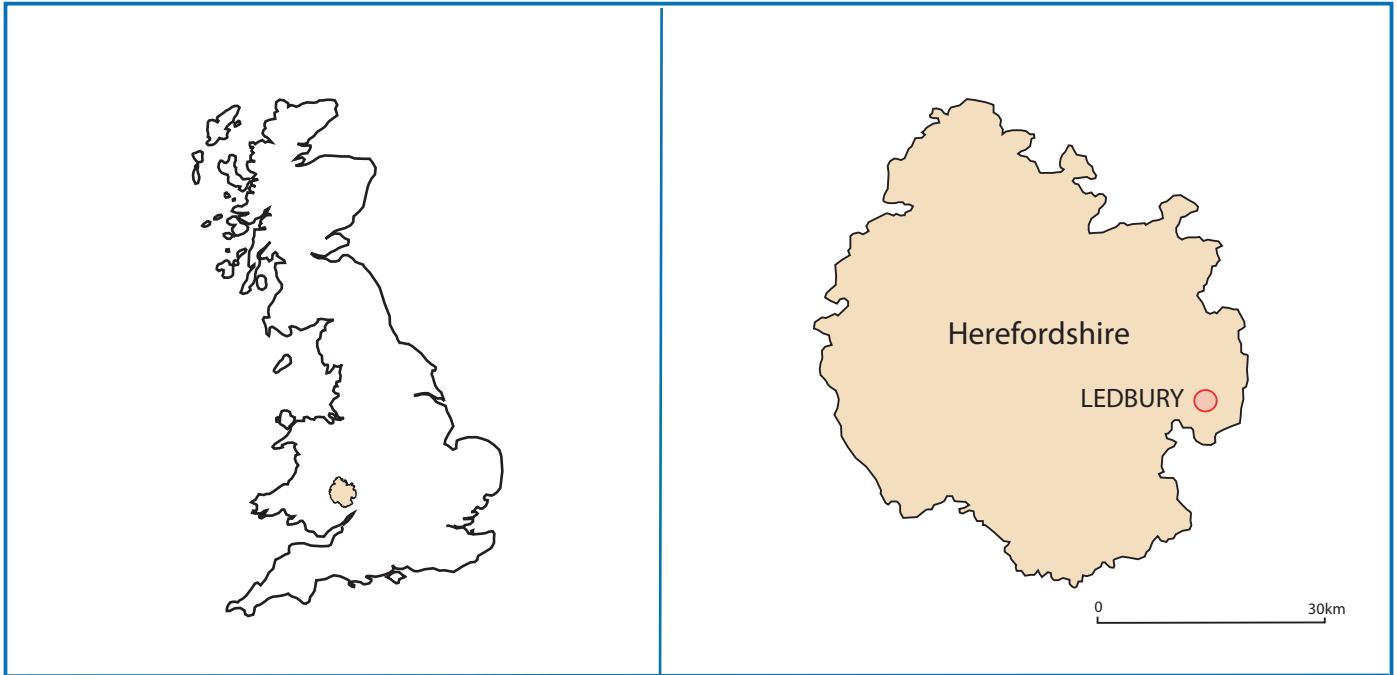
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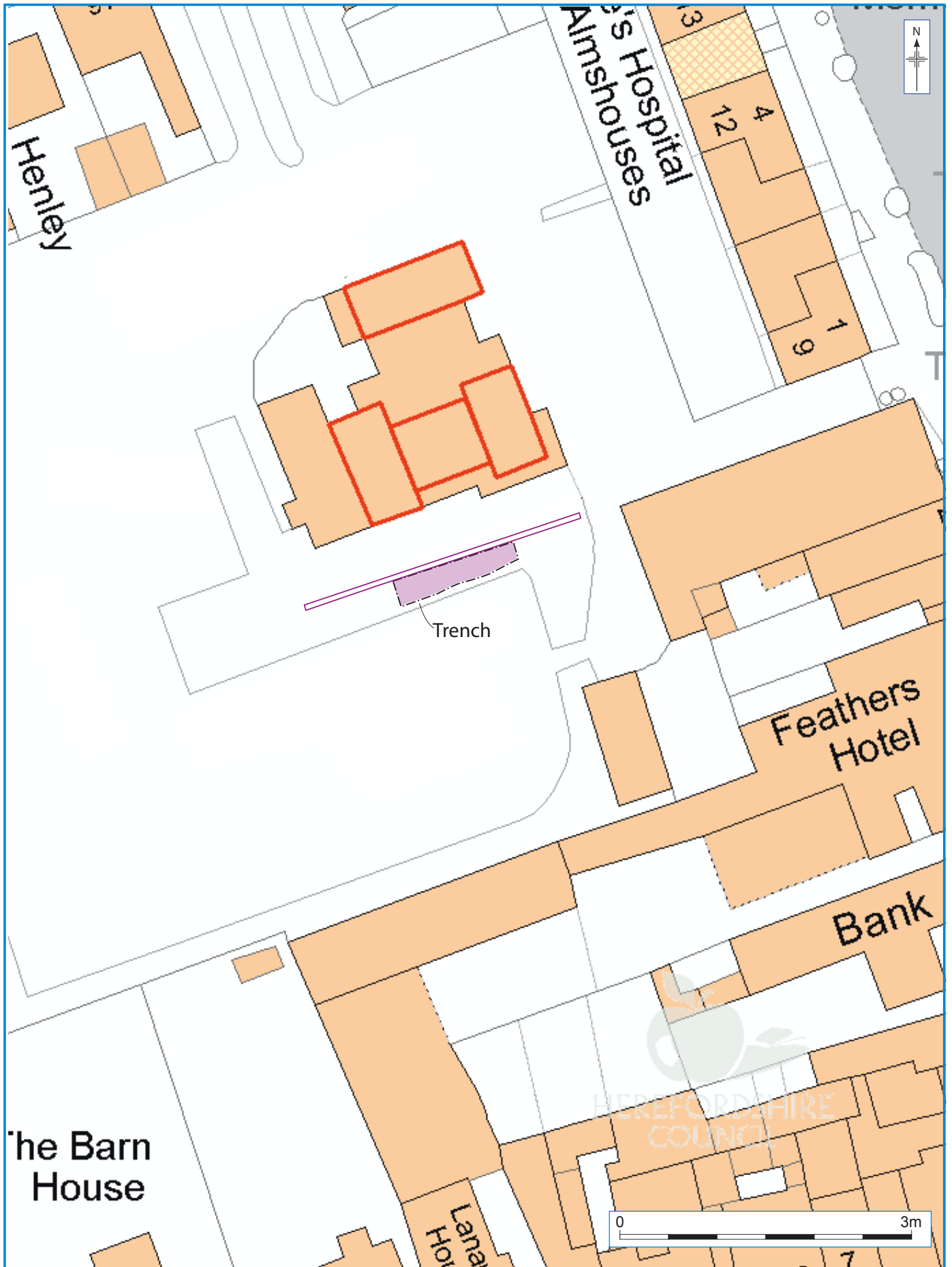
Figures



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Location of site and sites in the vicinity

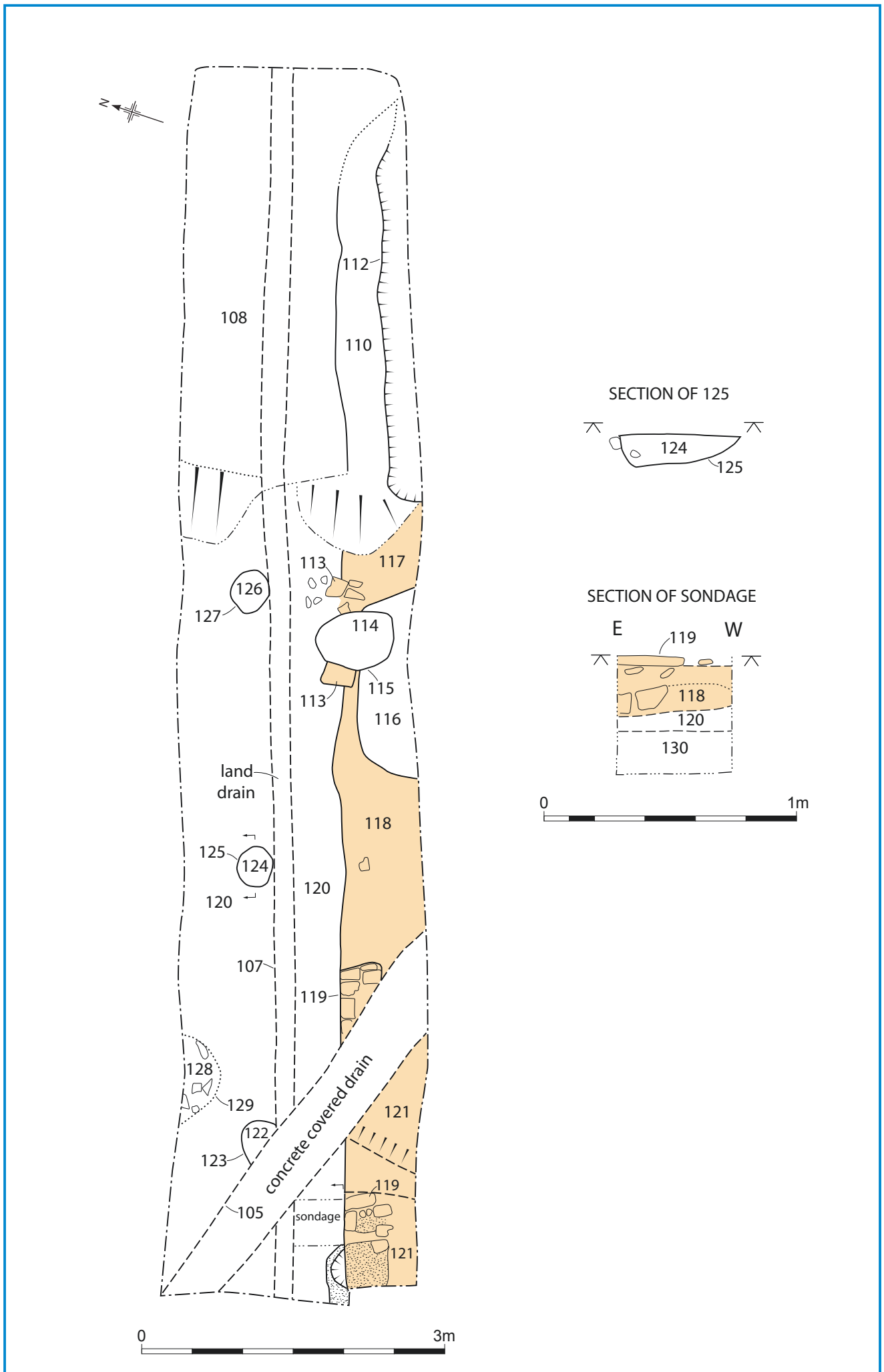
Figure 1



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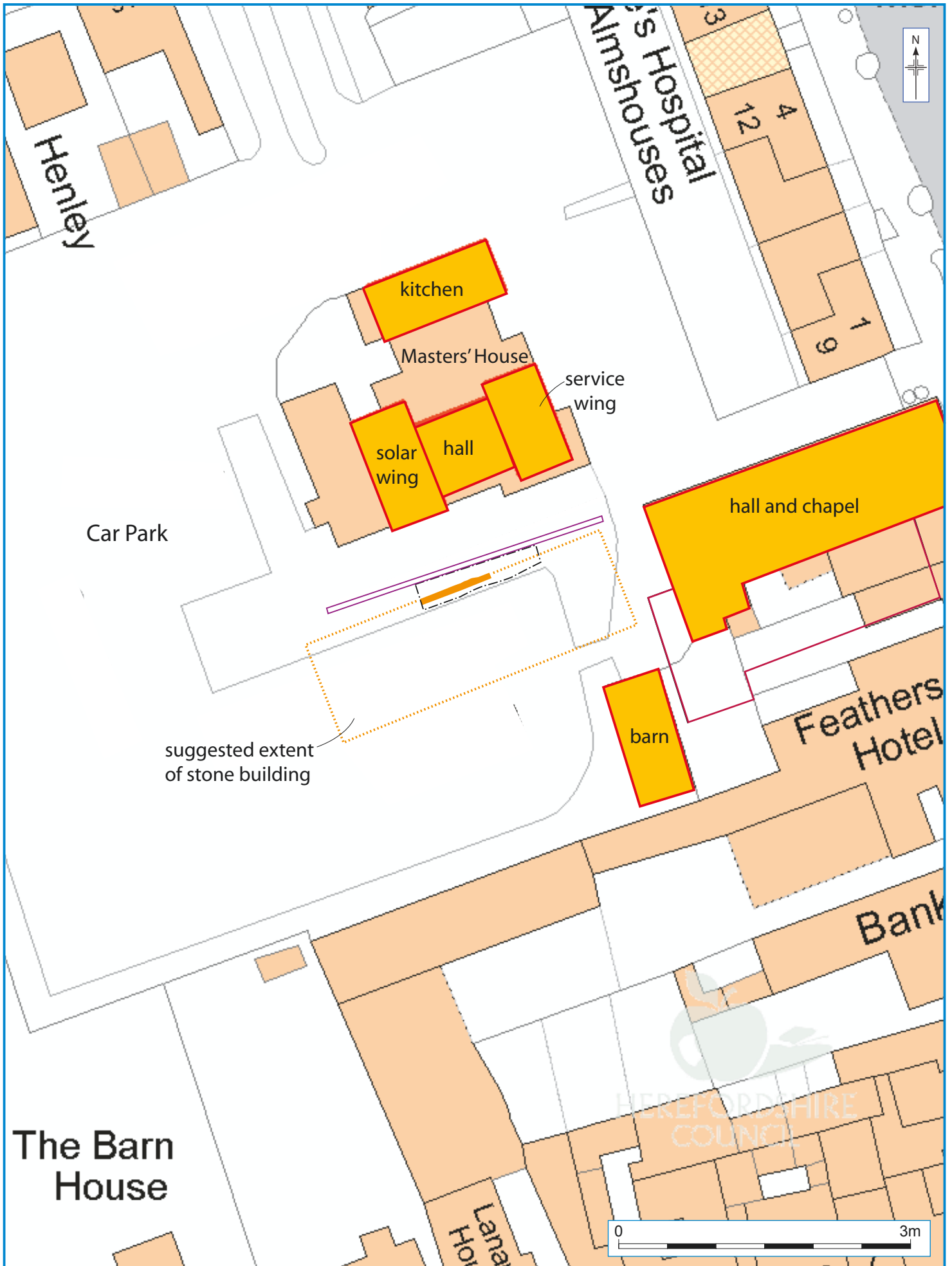
Trench location plan

Figure 2



Plan of trench

Figure 3



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Suggested location of stone building

Figure 4

Plates



Location of trench in relation to late 15th century Master's House (left) and 13th/14th century hall and chapel (background)_
Plate 1



General view of trench facing south showing flat stones and rubble base/core of medieval wall
Plate 2



Flat stones and rubble base/core of wall, facing south-west

Plate 3



Less truncated remains of wall at west end of trench

Plate 4



More truncated length of wall near centre of trench

Plate 5



Section of sondage showing flat stones and rubble base of wall over marl substrate

Plate 6

Appendix 1: Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 12.25m Width: 2.25m Depth: c.0.90m

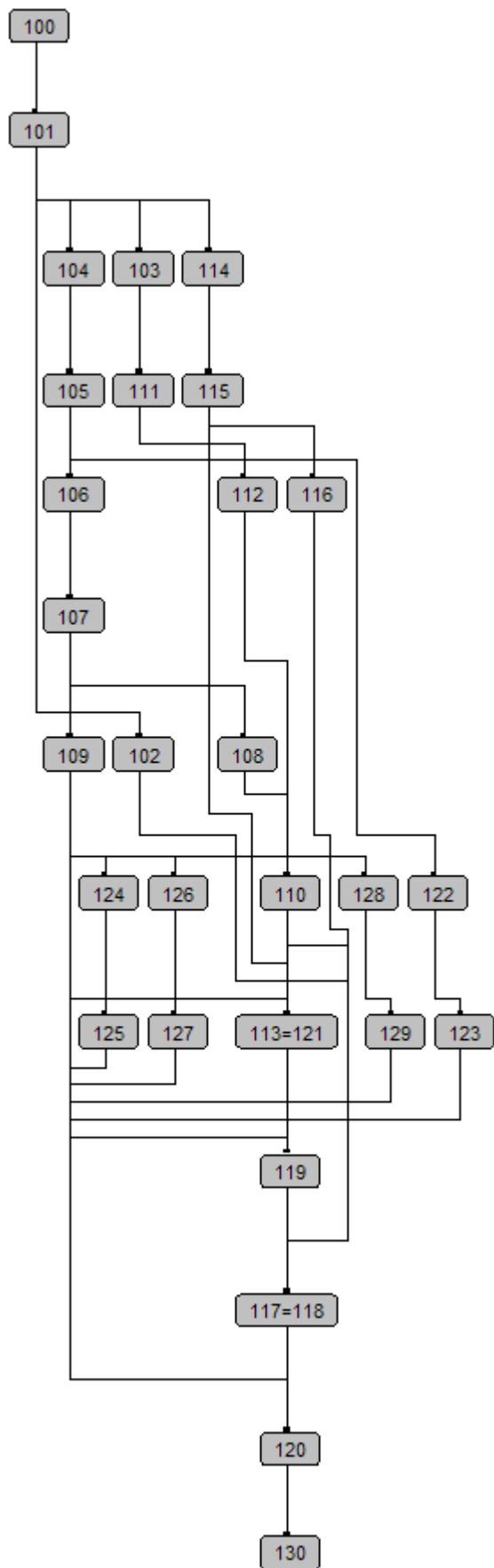
Orientation: E-W

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Soft dark greyish brown silt loam with common fine-medium roots.	0.00-0.15m
101	Made ground	Firm mid-dark brown silt loam with few charcoal fragments, ceramics and mortar flecks.	0.15-0.75m
102	Interface	Number applied to artefacts recovered from interface between 101 and rubble wall 118 / 121.	c. 0.75m
103	Layer	Spread of dark black charcoal-rich sandy silt with common brick and tile fragments and occasional mortar fragments and small angular stones.	0.72-0.77m
104	Fill	Concrete encased drain. Fill of 105.	0.57m
105	Cut	Cut for modern drain, aligned SE-NW. Width: 0.60m. Filled by 104. Not excavated.	0.57m
106	Fill	Ceramic land drain consisting of horse-shoe shaped drainage tiles (each 0.36m in length), filled with soft light greenish brown silt. Fill of 107.	0.73m
107	Cut	Cut for ceramic land drain, aligned E-W. Width: 0.24m. Filled by 106. Not excavated.	0.73m
108	Made ground	Firm dark greyish brown silt loam with common small-medium angular stones and few charcoal fragments and ceramics. Not excavated.	0.79m
109	Layer	Firm-friable mid greenish brown sand with small gravels.	0.75-0.85m
110	Made ground	Mixed deposit. Predominantly light reddish brown clay silt with some mid-greyish brown silty sand and common small angular stones. Very compact. Not excavated.	0.77m
111	Fill	Soft mid greenish brown silt loam with common fragments of charcoal and ceramics. Fill of 112.	0.77-0.85m
112	Linear cut	Partially exposed linear cut aligned E-W. Exposed edge has gently sloping sides and a flattish base. Filled by 111.	0.77-0.85m
113	Structure	Spread of medium-large platy stones which project slightly from the line of medieval wall 119. Threshold? Not excavated.	0.77m
114	Fill	Firm dark greyish brown silt loam with some light	0.77m

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
		reddish brown clay silt and few charcoal and mortar fragments. Fill of 115.	
115	Posthole cut	Oval in plan (0.78m x 0.58m). Filled by 115. Not excavated.	0.77m
116	Layer	Compact light reddish brown clay silt with few small angular stones and fragments of mortar and CBM. Not excavated.	0.73m
117	Layer	Compact mid brown silt loam with few small angular stones and mortar fragments. Not excavated.	0.75m
118	Layer	Concentration of medium-large sub-angular stones in a matrix of mid greyish brown silt loam with few charcoal and mortar flecks. Sits below medieval wall 119 and follows its alignment.	0.76-0.93m
119	Wall	Wall consisting of one / two courses of lias slabs bonded with light brownish yellow fine sandy mortar. Northern face only visible.	0.61-0.71m
120	Made ground	Firm mid greenish and reddish brown clay silt with irregular concentrations of small-medium angular stones.	0.89-1.01m
121	Wall	Concentration of stone rubble in firm mid reddish brown silt loam matrix. Rubble core of wall 119. Not excavated.	0.61m
122	Fill	Firm mid greyish brown silt loam with few flecks of mortar, charcoal, ceramics and small angular stones. Fill of 123.	0.81m
123	Posthole cut	Appears oval in plan but truncated by 105. Filled by 122. Not excavated.	0.81m
124	Fill	Firm mid greyish brown silt loam with few flecks of mortar, charcoal, ceramics and small angular stones. Fill of 125.	0.89-1.01m
125	Posthole cut	Circular in plan with gently sloping sides and a flat base. Filled by 124.	0.89-1.01m
126	Fill	Compact mid greyish brown silt loam with common small gravels. Fill of 127	0.89m
127	Posthole cut	Circular in plan. Filled by 126. Not excavated.	0.89m
128	Fill	Soft mid brown silty sand with few large sub-angular stones and occasional charcoal flecks.	0.81m
129	Cut	Appears sub-circular in plan but only partially visible. Filled by 128. Not excavated.	0.81m
130	Deposit	Natural marl: compact mid reddish brown clay silt	1.01m+

Appendix 2: Harris matrix



Appendix 3: The archive

The archive consists of:

- 1 Fieldwork progress record AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 57 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 1 Context number catalogues AS5
- 1 Levels record sheets AS19
- 22 Abbreviated context records AS40
- 6 Scale drawings
- 1 Box of finds

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Hereford City Museum and Art Gallery

Broad Street

Hereford

HR4 9RU

Tel. Hereford (01432) 268121 extension 207/334
